

ON TRACK WITH MDT

December 2001

MDT has long focused on improving safety, and those efforts have moved to the forefront with the advent of our new mission, "serving the public by providing a transportation system and services that emphasize quality, safety, cost effectiveness, economic vitality and sensitivity to the environment." Because of our staff's collective efforts, MDT received some wonderful accolades at the October 16 Safety Day celebration: we were honored with a gold level Governor's Employee Safety Program Award and a \$201,488 dividend check from State Fund (the largest check awarded to any state agency).

All I can say is, "Wow!" The strides we have made in improving safety are incredible. We have established a network of safety committees throughout the state, groups that have proven instrumental in identifying safety concerns and providing solutions, i.e., the Havre Area safety committee's safety poster campaign, which focused on preventing backing accidents and reduced the number of incidents to zero. Our organizational development staff have made key strides in improving ergonomics in the workplace, designing offices that curtail repetitive motion injuries; in auditing our office buildings to improve air quality and reduce what is commonly called sick building syndrome; and in upgrading our hazardous materials communications program to provide vital information in an easy-to-read, accessible format.

In addition, in fiscal year 2001, 14.7% of MDT's employees participated in defensive driving classes, the highest participation rate of any state agency. We've also become a leader in the early return-to-work program, and we've worked with State Fund in pioneering an electronic reporting system for work injuries, which has reduced the time required for processing claims.

As if this weren't enough, our staff have reduced injury totals such that MDT realized a 21% reduction in our workers' compensation losses during fiscal year 2000 compared to the average yearly losses for the four years prior. This has not only saved the department a tremendous amount in terms of time lost on the job; it has also led to a corresponding reduction in insurance premium costs. Plus, it means fewer injuries, for which I'm thankful: I don't like to see any of my people hurt.

And that is why I'm writing this article. Yes, winter is upon us, and we need to remain alert for changing conditions, but safety needs to be a key issue every day of the year. We have employees, contractors and constituents out on our roads on a regular basis, and hazards are always present. So, to the construction worker out taking asphalt samples or running heavy equipment, I say, please remember to wear the appropriate safety gear and follow work zone guidelines. To the truck driver pulled over for an inspection, I say, please be aware of the person working around your truck – and to the person conducting the inspection, I say, please take necessary precautions to ensure

your safety, especially if you need to inspect a cargo truck. And, to everyone out on our roads this winter – whether that be an MDT employee plowing snow or a constituent traveling our roads – I say, be safe. There is a reason that we say, “Don’t crowd the plow,” and it comes from our need to keep our constituents clear of sand and snow coming off the truck. We are on the cutting edge in terms of safety, and we can and will continue to make our roads a safer venue to work and travel on. That’s an essential part of being “on track” with MDT.

Dave Galt
Director